

‘Panchayat holda the key’

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The Prime Minister, Dr. Manmohan Singh, today emphasized on the need for effective functioning of panchayati raj institutions in remote and backward areas of the country to tackle the Maoist problem.

Addressing a function here on the occasion of Panchayati Raj Diwas, he said, “We should see that panchayati raj institutions work effectively in remote and backward areas including lands inhabited by the tribals. This will help deal with problems like Maoism.”

The PM said the government was aware of the problems faced by panchayats and was keen to ensure “funds, function and functionaries” for them.

Panchayats not only enable the marginalized sections to take part in the democratic decision-making process but also ensure transparency and accountability in government functioning, he said, adding. “Special emphasis has been laid on schemes relating to panchayati raj institutions in the 11th (Five year) plan.”

Dr. Singh said the 73rd amendment of the Constitution came into effect on 24 April 1993, to provide for democratic governance in local bodies at three levels. “This amendment has enabled decentralization at the lowest level.”

Dr. Singh felt power equations in villages had changed as a result and it had helped in the empowerment of the poor. “Over 28 lakh people have been formally included in the country’s democratic system through nearly 600 district panchayats, 6000 intermediate panchayats and 230,000 gram panchayats,” he said

Panchayati raj is PM's cure-all

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Prime Minister Manmohan Singh on Saturday said the Maoist menace could be countered by empowering the rural poor and marginalized sections, including tribals, through strengthening of Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs).

Inaugurating a two-day conference on National Panchayati Raj Day, Singh said, "We should pay special attention to ensure that PRIs function effectively in remote and backward areas, which include tribal areas. This will help us in tackling the challenges such as the Maoist menace."

Underlining the importance of participatory panchayats in assimilating the local needs, he said, "Panchayats not only make direct participation possible for the marginalized section of the society in governance, but also plays an important role in ensuring transparency and accountability in the functioning of Government institutions and officials."

The Prime Minister termed the Day as "historic" for PRIs, as it was on this day in 1993 the 73rd Constitutional Amendment was implemented to enable the three-tier Panchayats for governance at the grassroots.

Underlining that the Amendment has brought about a sea change in the power equations in the rural areas, he said over 28 lakh people have now officially become part of the country's democracy through about 600 district panchayats, 6,000 intermediate panchayats and 2.3 lakh gram panchayats.

The prime Minister also noted that a number of steps have been taken to empower the panchayats, including 33 percent reservation for women.

Presently, about 10 lakh women work in rural India as elected representative and with the implementation of the proposed 50 percent quota for women in PRIs, their number is expected to increase to 14 lakh in the PRIs, he said.

While Union Rural Development and Panchayati Raj Minister CP Joshi underscored the need for another Constitutional Amendment to make devolution of power by State Government to PRIs mandatory, Panchayati Raj Secretary ANP Sinha urged the PM to increase the Plan allocation for the ministry.